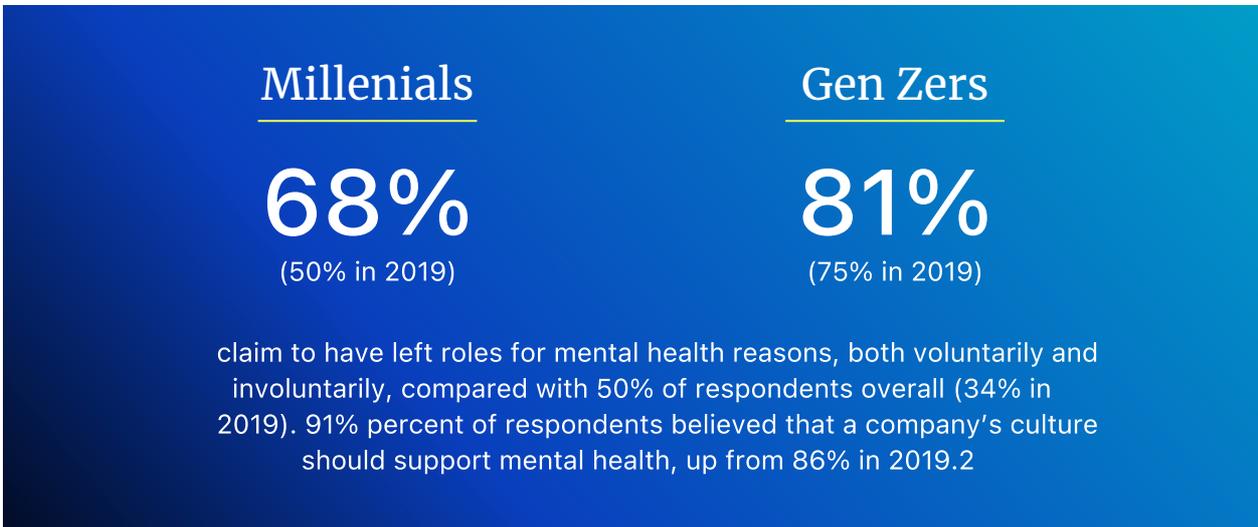


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Buyer's Guide to Mental Healthcare Benefits for Employees

How to choose the best mental health
partner for an organization

In 2020, employer-sponsored mental health programs and support went from a nice incentive to a core business imperative. One that many companies have prioritized as a critical vertical for employee well-being initiatives.



Mental health and work are interchangeably connected. If not equipped with the tools to proactively address mental health challenges associated with stress, burnout, fatigue, chronic pain, depression, and other conditions, individuals face adversities to work through preventable or correctable struggles. Poor mental health impacts every spectrum of health associated with complete well-being, including physical, economic, social, financial, and occupational. Specifically related to occupational well-being, an employee's capacity to be present, engaged, and productive at work can be consequently impaired while experiencing underlying mental health symptoms. Absenteeism and staff turnover affects both workers and employers and, in turn, the society's economy.

Whether you're at the scoping phase and are starting to think about what kind of infrastructure your client needs or are reviewing the myriad of mental health solutions on the market, this guide will put you in the strongest position to choose the best partner for an organization. It will give you the resources needed to identify the impactful, scalable mental health solution that can build a strong foundation for holistic employee wellness.

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Breaking Barriers to Mental Health

Time to care

Long waits for mental health treatment are a nationwide problem, with reports of patients waiting an average of five to six weeks for care.

To put this into perspective, imagine you've recently experienced a physical injury, such as a broken arm. You need to go to the doctor to receive the appropriate care but can't get in to see anyone for another 5-6 weeks. In the US health system, that simply wouldn't happen. An individual experiencing debilitating mental health conditions such as severe anxiety or depression shouldn't and can't wait 5-6 weeks to receive proper treatment.

Employees should have access to personalized mental healthcare whenever they need it. Being able to seek the support needed at any time of the day instead of having to wait for a long period to get an appointment can help prevent issues such as stress and burnout from getting worse and becoming a problem. This isn't just in their best interest, it's in yours as an employer, to improve attendance and productivity.

Mental health apps have the twin advantages of accessibility and convenience, ensuring that busy employees don't have to wait until they are unwell to get care. They break down cost and time-related barriers with quick access to care. They also offer a variety of self-help tools, skills, and resources that can help employees manage their mental health. These can include mindfulness exercises, mood-tracking journals, and therapy techniques. At the same time, mental health platforms need to be easy to navigate to encourage user sign-ups. Ensure that your solution has a simple and efficient onboarding process.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- How fast is the onboarding process for patients?
- What is the average time to care for patients?
- Are self-help tools and resources available to individuals?
- Do individuals have 24/7 access to care?

Wysa provides round-the-clock access and support for individuals facing everyday stresses, as well as for critical moments of crisis when traditional mental health channels are usually inaccessible. Wysa's conversational AI listens to users without judgment and guides them toward helpful exercises and resources, based on evidence-based techniques for anxiety, stress, relationships, sleep, and other issues.

Wysa's AI is trained by leading mental healthcare professionals and is continuously updated to leverage new techniques, terms, and responses. It doesn't use generative AI which can introduce bias. Additionally, your employees can also connect to a well-being coach for personalized counseling via audio, video, or text. Using Wysa is a bit like having a therapist in your pocket 24/7. It ensures that support is always available, thus redefining what accessible mental healthcare means.

Stigma

The stigma around mental healthcare (i.e., negative attitudes or discrimination) continues to place a formidable barrier to care and plays a significant role in the ability of Americans to receive the care they need to live happy and healthy lives.

Leaving a wound or injury unattended heightens the risk of infection and escalated issues. The same can be said for untreated mental health conditions. Greater self-stigma (internalized shame and negative attitude towards one's condition) is associated with lower mental illness outcomes by way of self-esteem, increased psychiatric symptoms, social isolation, and difficulties at work.

Stigma can cause people to avoid or delay seeking or receiving treatment. The National Alliance of Mental Illness reports that

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workers say shame and stigma prevent them from seeking treatment for a mental health condition.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- Does your employee need to ask permission to access the available help?
- Can employees be confident that no one at work will know they are seeking help?
- Does your solution leverage AI to streamline access?

Taking the first step can often be the hardest part of your mental health journey due to the stigma. Since all conversations on Wysa are completely anonymous, this creates a safe space for users to get the help they need without any shame.

Wysa's conversational AI listens to users without judgment and guides them toward helpful exercises and resources, based on evidence-based techniques for anxiety, stress, relationships, sleep, and other issues. It provides immediate and suitable interventions through self-help resources. In this way, it acts as a 'digital front door' and eliminates the stigma of having to step forward and ask for help.

Lack of therapists

The market for mental health solutions has exploded, initially catapulted by the need for remote mental healthcare options amidst COVID, and accelerated by billions of investment capital. Though growth indicates breaking down barriers associated with mental health like time to care and stigma, scalability is a big question mark due to the lack of qualified mental health professionals.

There is a dangerous imbalance of provider resources to patient needs, with 77 percent of counties across the US having severe shortages of behavioral health professions. By 2025, the expected demand will top 60,000, leaving a shortfall of over 15,000 professionals. The Health Resources and Services Administration reports that we "need to add 10,000 providers to each of seven separate mental healthcare professions by 2025 to meet the expected growth in demand."

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- With the lack of mental health professionals, how do you effectively scale mental health programs to large organizations without extended wait times to care?
- Is the solution accessible and comprehensive for all levels of need?

Wysa's conversational AI can close the gap in access to care for employees and scale mental health programs without straining limited provider resources. Wysa is powered by clinically validated protocols and based on evidence-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques.

Further, since its AI integrates with existing resources at organizations, including EAPs and crisis lines, it can intelligently guide users based on where they are on their mental health journey.

For example, someone with mild symptoms can be guided to work on proactive mental healthcare by using self-care tools to build mental resilience. For another person requiring a higher level of intervention, mental health status questionnaires and the user's conversations with the AI can guide them towards human support in the form of coaching sessions, third-party EAPs, or emergency helplines. In this way, Wysa can help organizations meet the growing demand for mental healthcare.

Wysa at every severity

Symptoms

GAD-7 & PHQ-9 on Wysa suggests **mild** symptoms:

- Several days with poor sleep
- Lack of interest in activities
- Low energy

Through digital assessment, the patient indicates mild anxiety and depression.



Care program

- **Prevention of deterioration**
- 24/7 AI care companion
- CBT tools and resources
- Learning mental health resilience in how to cope with daily life struggles
- Regular assessments on Wysa to measure improvement

Symptoms

GAD-7 & PHQ-9 on Wysa suggests **moderate** symptoms:

- 8-14 days of restless sleep
- Feeling down half the time
- Low productivity and trouble concentrating

Through digital assessment, the patient indicates moderate anxiety and depression.



Care program

- 24/7 AI care companion
- CBT tools and resources
- CBT based daily clinical-programs that build skills and help improve symptoms
- Human wellbeing coaching
- **Regular assessments on Wysa to measure improvement**

Symptoms

GAD-7 & PHQ-9 on Wysa suggests **severe** symptoms:

- 11+ sleepless nights
- Isolating tendencies
- Occasional thoughts imagining ending life

Through digital assessment, the patient indicates severe anxiety and depression.



Care program

- **Crisis intervention + SOS triggers built in**
- 24/7 AI care companion
- Psychotherapist guided CBT & journaling on Wysa
- Daily clinical-programs
- Human wellbeing
- Pathway to EAP triggered

Geography

Geography has long been a hurdle that affects people's access to mental health care, predominantly due to the lack of availability of professionals in rural areas, in parallel with the increasing demand and shortages of mental health services.

27% Of mental health needs are being met in health professional shortage areas.

Cities and entire states that have limited access to mental health programs are associated with higher rates of mental health conditions, as severe as suicidal ideation and death.

Over the last year, 9-8-8 was declared the new suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline, creating an opportunity for an equitable health care response to mental health crises with better outcomes as people receive the services and support they need to remain in their communities and thrive. However, of the 13 states with the highest rates of suicidal ideation, only four have successfully passed state legislation for 9-8-8 implementations: Utah, Oregon, Indiana, and Colorado.

Not only is access harder to come by, but rural patients pay higher out-of-pocket costs for mental health care providers outside of their insurance networks in comparison to urban settings due to a lack of specialists in their areas.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- Does care operate through insurance partnership networks?
- Are there limitations to care on a state-by-state basis depending on insurance network partnerships?
- What is the pricing per member per month PEPM?

As an AI-powered digital mental health solution, Wysa makes it possible to access care remotely across geographical and socio-economic barriers. This can be in the form of self-help resources or coaching.

Recent research suggests that digital mental health improves access to mental health services across ethnic and racial minorities, in rural areas, the LGBTQ+ community etc. Wysa is also adding support for additional languages such as Spanish and Hindi to make care as accessible as possible, irrespective of geographical location.

Data Privacy and Security as a Top Priority

Over the last few years, mental health apps have filled a significant void in traditional therapy, making care more accessible on one's smartphone. Despite dealing with intimate information about sensitive issues such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and eating disorders, many mental health apps fall short when it comes to data privacy and security.

Privacy and Security Report for Mental Health Apps

According to a recent report called "Privacy Not Included" by Mozilla Foundation, mental health apps are worse than any other app category when it comes to protecting people's privacy and security. The Mozilla Foundation investigated 32 mental health and prayer apps and found that 28 failed to adequately protect consumer privacy, and 25 failed to meet Mozilla Foundation's minimum security standards such as requiring strong passwords and managing security updates and vulnerabilities. The report noted that Wysa was a rare exception that valued users' privacy.

Health data has become extremely valuable for medical research, breakthrough treatments, new drugs, and personalized care. The World Health Organization encourages the sharing of this data for public interest but only with the patient's consent, and in a manner that protects their privacy and prevents inappropriate use.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated this shift toward digital healthcare and demonstrated the importance of high-quality health data. The entry of big tech companies into digital healthcare has further raised alarms over the loss of privacy. In such a situation, it is of utmost importance that digital health platforms take responsibility for the rights of consumers and are transparent about the nature and scale of data sharing.

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“How does Wysa's privacy look? We're so happy to say, Wysa's privacy looks pretty dang good! They seem to be one of the rare mental health apps that aren't looking to make money off your personal information. Good work Wysa!”

-Mozilla Foundation

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Questions to ask mental health providers:

What is your data-sharing policy?

Is employee information anonymized for privacy?

If not, how does your company use employee PII and PHI?

Privacy is at the heart of Wysa. Its industry-leading approach to privacy completely avoids capturing identifiable user data. By using nicknames instead of personal information to use the platform, users feel secure and can focus exclusively on their care. Even when connected with a human coach or therapist, Wysa doesn't collect personal data, covered by HIPAA or otherwise, to maintain a singular commitment to the privacy of its users. When collecting anonymized data insights for employers, all data is heavily encrypted to ensure complete security. Wysa remains unmatched in the industry and has been recognized by several champions of digital privacy including Mozilla.

Stopping the Bleed of Medical Claims

Lack of preventive and personalized care

60% of your workforce's mental health needs are not covered by current solutions. Waiting until a mental health crisis makes treatment more expensive and difficult to navigate, versus having effective support earlier for low acuity symptoms.

When it comes to mental health, there can be no one-size-fits-all approach. Every person has unique needs and symptoms. Similarly, different types of needs and symptoms require different kinds of mental healthcare. Standard mental health services and resources are designed to kick in when a crisis arises such as self-harm ideation suicidal thoughts, alcohol dependence, or diagnosis of severe depression or anxiety disorder. The difficulty is that not many people know when they need this level of care. It's tricky to self-diagnose so some people who should go into high intensity treatment are missed, because they underestimate their severity.

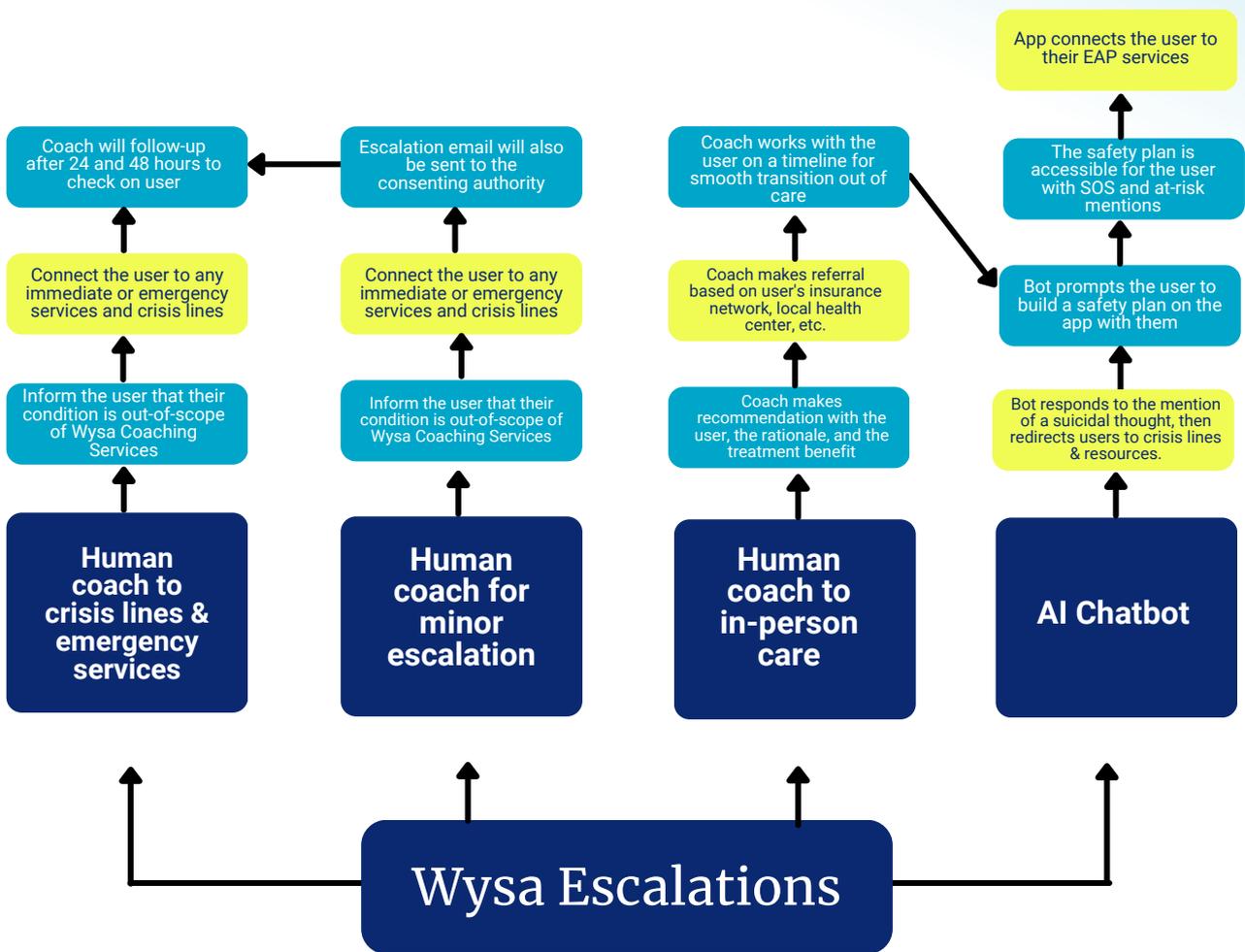
Others over estimate their need and opt for high-cost psychotherapy that could easily have been avoided with evidence-based self-care tools. These people will benefit from sub-clinical care while symptoms are at mild to moderate levels, to prevent worsening conditions that may arise if overlooked.

Finding the right help can often be a slow and tedious process. AI can help streamline this by regularly checking need levels and suggesting the right treatment quickly and efficiently. Digital mental health platforms that use the power of AI to navigate users according to their needs and then identify the appropriate support have escalation pathways built in.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- What kind of preventative mental healthcare do you offer employees?
- How does your solution offer personalized care to employees?
- How does your solution detect an individual in crisis?
- What does the escalation pathway look like and what risk does it carry?

Privacy is at the heart of Wysa. Its industry-leading approach to privacy completely avoids capturing identifiable user data. By using nicknames instead of personal information to use the platform, users feel secure and can focus exclusively on their care. Even when connected with a human coach or therapist, Wysa doesn't collect personal data, covered by HIPAA or otherwise, to maintain a singular commitment to the privacy of its users. When collecting anonymized data insights for employers, all data is heavily encrypted to ensure complete security. Wysa remains unmatched in the industry and has been recognized by several champions of digital privacy including Mozilla.



Wysa offers employers a workplace solution that addresses the full spectrum of behavioral health needs. The app is integrated with existing company benefits, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or external healthcare provider networks. Through text-based conversation, Wysa's AI chatbot navigates users, guiding them through appropriate, evidence-based CBT exercises within the app, but also towards other mental health services within your chosen benefits package, or crisis support if required. The chatbot detects signals that the user needs more help and immediately redirects them to resources such as the EAP or the company's mental health provider, while also providing grounding exercises in a moment of crisis. These escalation pathways can be customized for different cohorts.

The important correlation between chronic pain and mental health conditions

The economic burden of chronic pain is huge, costing the United States an estimated \$560 to \$635 billion yearly in medical claims and absenteeism.

Chronic pain is a long-term debilitating health concern that affects physical, psychological, cognitive, and social functioning, resulting in significant care costs. Chronic pain conditions are associated with comorbidities such as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, fatigue, and more. Employees struggling with chronic pain have issues with typical day-to-day demands and activities, and struggle with productivity and absenteeism, as they constantly focus on the pain individuals are experiencing. Individuals experiencing pain-related depression and anxiety are also likely to have worse outcomes from chronic pain.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- What peer-reviewed published research proves the efficacy of your product or service?
- What kind of clinical programs do you offer for specific conditions that help combat long-term downstream medical claim costs?

When analyzing mental health solutions, look for evidence of published, peer-reviewed clinical outcomes that prove efficacy.

Studies by Wysa show that AI-driven mental health conversational agents are effective in helping patients with chronic pain learn to self-manage their pain and deal with comorbidities like depression and anxiety. Most recently, a 2022 study conducted by Wysa aimed to examine the differences in engagement and effectiveness of leveraging isolated AI digital mental health intervention for users experiencing chronic pain, versus in conjunction with human support. The trial participants had self-reported chronic pain and co-existing elevated symptoms of anxiety and depression and used the Wysa App for Chronic Pain. The results pointed to Wysa as an effective, scalable solution for organizations. There were clinically meaningful improvements in pain interference, physical function, and levels of anxiety and depression.

What does this mean for your organization? If conversational AI can effectively provide impactful mental healthcare to individuals struggling with chronic pain and comorbid anxiety/depression symptoms, AI digital interventions are the answer to scalable care and making a larger impact on absenteeism and medical claim cost savings.

Uptake Rates for Existing Mental Health Programs

Mental health program uptake

Research shows that digital mental health interventions are often associated with relatively poor adoption and adherence for a multitude of reasons. One reason is that there is poor engagement with digital tools. This could be due to an insufficient therapeutic alliance, bond, or trust. Growing numbers of studies support natural language understanding (NLU) based AI companions and interventions as an effective and feasible tool for the delivery of mental well-being to individuals with self-reported anxiety and depressive symptoms.

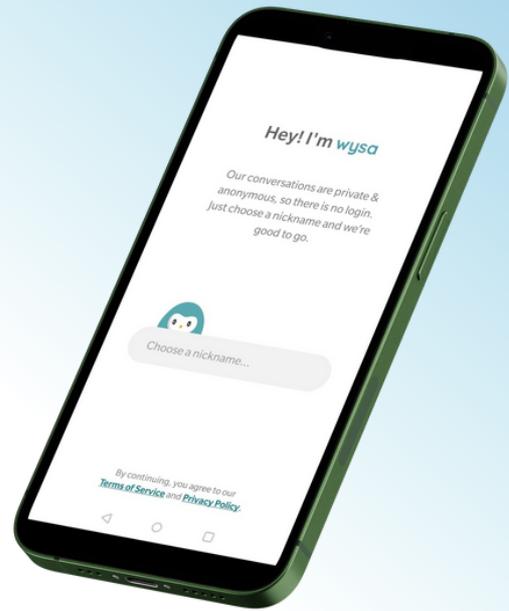
While digital mental health solutions offer advantages such as accessibility, successfully engaging users to complete interventions remains a challenge for many. Most US employers offer EAPs that include counseling and mental health support. However, average EAP utilization rates in the US are typically less than 10%. In such a scenario, you should look for a provider that can offer guidance to ensure that your employees are aware of the support that exists and increase engagement.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- What is the average current uptake rate?
- Does the platform integrate with EAP solutions?
- How does the platform and team promote awareness and engagement?
- How does the platform increase uptake rates with existing EAPs?

Wysa helps employees run a mental health calendar with interactive campaigns that have helped boost usage to 10 times that of EAP in the past. It also has 90% positive ratings on users on average with a high engagement. Around 50% of Wysa users have at least 5+ sessions. One way in which Wysa enables this is by creating a strong therapeutic alliance, which is a crucial mechanism for change in psychotherapy interventions and helps people meet the goals of their treatment.

A recent peer-reviewed study by Wysa showed that people develop an emotional bond or 'therapeutic alliance' with its chatbot in the same way that they do with a human therapist. These findings show that users built a trusting relationship with the chatbot.



Efficacy and trackability

Companies must be able to track and measure the performance of the mental health solution they've opted for. Your provider should offer a data-rich evaluation of member utilization, engagement, and progress using standardized research measures such as the PHQ-9 questionnaire for depression and the GAD-7 questionnaire for anxiety. This becomes an intuitive listening tool for you to assess and then improve your workforce's well-being and productivity.

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Questions to ask mental health providers:

- What strategies do you use to grow awareness and uptake of the platform?
- What is the average employee uptake rate for your solution?
- What is the average number of sessions for users?
- Do you integrate with EAPs?
- How can your platform help us learn what employees are struggling with, and how they are improving with the tools your solution provides?

Currently, Wysa has facilitated over 400 million conversations with 4.5 million users in 65 countries. Wysa's customers include Aetna International, NHS, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Meta, Colgate, Sequoia, and more.



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Meeting Employees Where They Are At



In an independent research study that we commissioned in October 2022, we asked workers who they'd rather go to about their mental health, and respondents were more likely to select a mental health app with clinically proven self-help resources tailored to their needs than anyone in the workplace and even their general physician.

AI will continuously grow in popularity and intertwine into organizations' integral processes because of its deep learning capabilities and its scalable nature. Employers need to strongly consider AI for all avenues of employee engagement and well-being, including mental health. However, for it to effectively improve the lives of employees, conversational AI must be powered by clinically validated protocols based on evidence-based psychological treatments such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

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workers would rather go to the app than approach HR

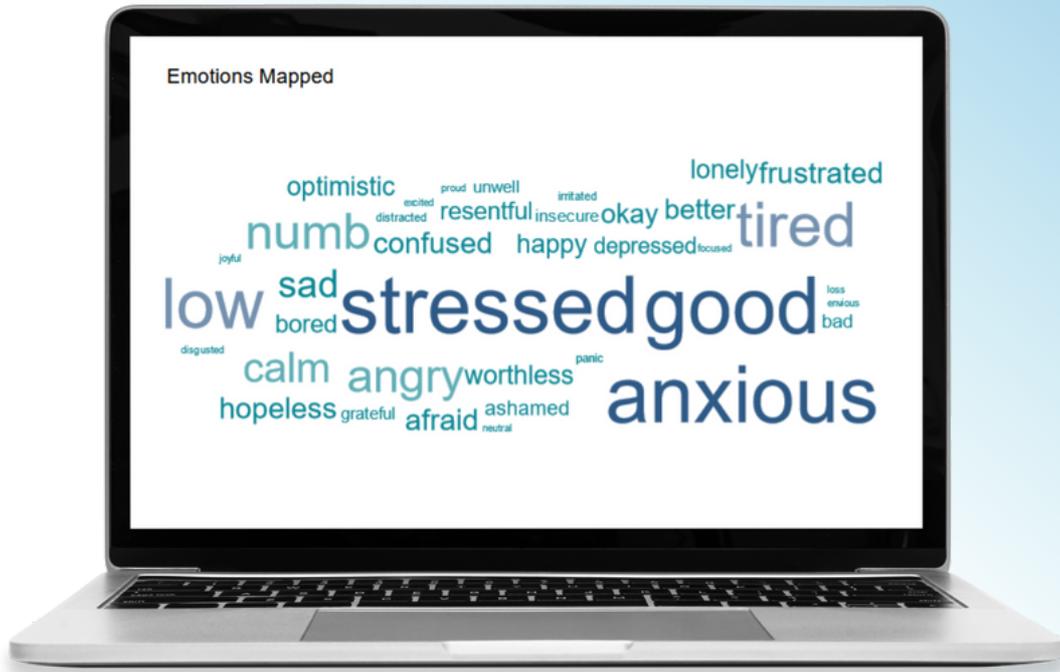
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workers would rather talk to an app than their manager.

As human beings, our mental health ebbs and flows in response to obstacles and challenges that we face every day. Clinically-driven AI that integrates with existing resources at your organization (EAPs, crisis lines, etc) creates an intelligent pathway to guide users based on where they are at in their journey.

Questions to ask mental health providers:

- If the mental health protocol is underpinned by AI, is your AI clinically validated? 
- What psychological treatment methods have been used to create AI pathways?
- Is your AI basic multiple-choice, or does it use natural language understanding?



Wysa's AI has been trained by leading mental healthcare professionals and carries with it a wide array of clinical validation. Its efficacy is backed by institutions such as the University of Cambridge, Harvard University, and Columbia University. This robust scientific backing and clinical proof have garnered Wysa the Breakthrough Device Designation by the FDA as well as NHS recognition.

Wysa gives employers detailed analytics and insights into their employees' challenges, the tools they find the most helpful, and their feedback after using the app. This serves as an important listening tool for you to assess how your workforce is doing right now while maintaining user privacy. Wysa also takes a hybrid and holistic approach to mental healthcare that mirrors the modern work model. Its services, ranging from self-care-guided tools to one-on-one coaching, align with the ebb and flow of modern health and meet users wherever they are on a daily basis.

Full list of questions to ask mental health providers:

- What is the average time to care for patients?
- How fast is the onboarding process for patients?
- What is the average time to care for patients?
- Are self-help tools and resources available to individuals?
- Do individuals have 24/7 access to care?
- Does your employee need to ask permission to access the available help?
- Can employees be confident that no-one at work will know they are seeking help?

- Does your solution leverage AI to streamline access?
- With the lack of mental health professionals, how do you effectively scale mental health programs to large organizations without extended wait times to care?
- Is the solution accessible and comprehensive for all levels of need?
- What is your data-sharing policy?
- Is employee information anonymized for privacy?
If not, how does your company use employee PII and PHI?
- What kind of preventative mental healthcare do you offer employees?
- How does your solution offer personalized care to employees?

- How does your solution detect an individual in crisis?
- What does the escalation pathway look like and what risk does it carry?
- What peer-reviewed published research proves the efficacy of your product or service?
- What kind of clinical programs do you offer for specific conditions that help combat long-term downstream medical claim costs?
- What is the average current uptake rate?
- Does the platform integrate with EAP solutions?
- How does the platform and team promote awareness and engagement?
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